

What is Traumatic Brain Injury

Introduction

A traumatic brain injury (TBI) is an injury to the brain caused by the head being hit by something or shaken violently. (The exact definition of TBI, according to special education law, is given below.) This injury can change how the person acts, moves, and thinks. A traumatic brain injury can also change how a student learns and acts in school. The term TBI is used for head injuries that can cause changes in one or more areas, such as:

- thinking and reasoning,
- understanding words,
- remembering things,
- paying attention,
- solving problems,
- thinking abstractly,
- talking,
- behaving,
- walking and other physical activities,
- seeing and/or hearing, and
- learning.

The term TBI is not used for a person who is born with a brain injury. It also is not used for brain injuries that happen during birth.

The definition of TBI below comes from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The IDEA is the federal law that guides how schools provide special education and related services to children and youth with disabilities.

IDEA's Definition of "Traumatic Brain Injury"

Our nation's special education law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines traumatic brain injury as...

"...an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term applies to open or closed head injuries resulting in impairments in one or more areas, such as cognition; language; memory; attention; reasoning; abstract thinking; judgment; problem-solving; sensory, perceptual, and motor abilities; psycho-social behavior; physical functions; information processing; and speech. The term does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative, or to brain injuries induced by birth trauma." [34 Code of Federal Regulations §300.7(c)(12)]